



Rhode Island State Police

General Order - 61A

<i>Section:</i>	Law Enforcement Operations - Field Operations
<i>Article:</i>	61 - Community Relations and Services
<i>Title:</i>	Public Information/Media Briefing
<i>Special Instructions:</i>	

I. PURPOSE

To provide procedures and guidelines which establish and maintain an effective public information program through the news media.

The primary goal is to provide a maximum flow of information with a minimum disruption of police service whereby that the news media may adequately and factually inform the general public of matters involving the Division of State Police. The secondary goals are to ensure that media briefings do not jeopardize criminal investigations, that they do not breach any privileges of confidentiality, and that they portray the Division in a professional manner.

II. POLICY

The Lieutenant Colonel-Field Operations is hereby assigned the position of Division Public Information Officer. The Lieutenant Colonel-Field Operations or his/her designee will attend to those duties to ensure that the Division meets both its responsibility to keep the state's citizens fully informed by assisting news personnel through broadcast and print media, of appropriate operational and administrative matters, and its obligation to protect the rights of accused citizens. The Public Information Officer is the link between the Division and the public through the news media. He/she will provide coordination with members of the media to promote highway safety, crime prevention programs, and provide news media interviews. Cooperative and respectful exchanges allow both the media and the Division to successfully fulfill their different methods of public service. Information that may be released by the media regarding on-going criminal investigations shall be reported to the Division's Public Information Officer, as soon as possible.

III. PROCEDURES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. The Public Information Officer or his/her designee will respond to the scene of all noteworthy incidents to serve the news media and assist in crisis situations within the Division. Until his/her arrival, the ranking Commissioned Officer at the scene will respond to any inquiry from the press, if appropriate. Such incidents include:

1. The search for a person that is given major media attention;
 2. Hostage situation, or barricaded subject;
 3. A riot or civil disturbance;
 4. A public demonstration on state property;
 5. A plane crash;
 6. A bomb detonation or other terrorist incident;
 7. State employees job action at the Adult Correctional Institutions (ACI) or the Institute of Mental Health (IMH); and/or,
 8. A major crime or accident scene.
- B. Only the Public Information Officer or his/her designee will be responsible for media inquiries on the following:
1. Division personnel matters;
 2. Division disciplinary matters;
 3. Division internal investigations;
 4. Division policy;
 5. Editorial responses;
 6. Investigations or arrests involving:
 - a. State agencies;
 - b. Other law enforcement agencies;
 - c. State or municipal officials;
 - d. Prominent personalities.
 7. Division involvement in any matter pertaining to the criminal justice system such as grand jury investigations;
 8. Threats in which public figures, dignitaries, or newsworthy persons, places, or things are involved;
 9. Division security threats;
 10. Serious physical injury or death to any Division member incurred in the line of duty;
 11. The use of deadly physical force by a Division member;
 12. Bomb threat where a device was subsequently found; and,
 13. Missing person where foul play is suspected.

C. RELEASE OF INFORMATION REGARDING DIVISION MEMBERS

1. Only the Superintendent, or designee, may authorize the release of personal information regarding Division members involved in critical incidents or internal investigation. The safety and needs of the community, the Division and the Division members involved will be taken into consideration.
2. Every attempt shall be made to release this information in a timely manner, typically 48 hours after a critical incident.
3. Personal information shall only be released after consultation with the State Attorney General and in accordance with Rhode Island General Laws and Division policies.

D. The following information SHALL NOT be released under any circumstances by any member:

1. The existence and/or identity of a suspect prior to arrest, except to the extent necessary to aid the investigation, to assist in a suspect's apprehension or to warn the public of potential danger;
2. Information which could lead to the discovery of the identity or address of a juvenile offender, except as authorized by law;
3. Statements concerning the character, reputation, and/or guilt of an accused person;
4. Any information regarding a statement, confession, or admission by an accused person;
5. The possibility of a guilty plea by an accused;
6. The merits of any case as it relates to the accused;
7. The past criminal record of an accused unless to warn the public of potential danger;
8. The names of victims of sexual assault or child molestation;
9. Any information about a crime which would be known only to the person(s) responsible for the crime.

E. The Public Information Officer and/or designee will:

1. Become acquainted with the members of the state's broadcast and print media and deal with them fairly. A rapport must be established to ensure a constant flow of information to the media and allow the news media to actively participate in the development of any changes in procedures related to this policy;
 2. Keep current the Division's telephone list of media representatives;
 3. Issue press releases in a timely manner on promotions and appropriate major incidents and arrests to all media representatives on the Division's media list. A copy of each release shall be maintained on file for one calendar year;
 4. Remain available to Supervisors within the Division to ensure arrests, serious and fatal accidents, as well as newsworthy incidents are routinely being reported to local news media outlets;
 5. Arrange for and assist at news conferences.
 6. Coordinate all requests for Division members to appear at various speaking engagements such as schools, community group meetings, or career events and maintain involvement in programs to promote the Division's goals and traffic safety related messages;
 7. Coordinate the release of victim and witness information when appropriate.
 8. The Public Information Officer or his/her designee will not release the identity of any deceased victim to the news media until confirmation has been received that the next of kin has been notified;
- F. At the scene of a major incident that any medium chooses to cover, an area will be established for mobile crews and reporters by the Officer-in-Charge, convenient to the command post. Access for media personnel shall be as convenient as possible for them, consistent with their safety and the ability of the Division to successfully resolve the situation or maintain the integrity of the crime scene. The Public Information Officer or his/her designee shall provide timely situation briefings to media representatives and prepare a news release with the member in charge of the scene.

IV. PROVISIONS

- A. Pictures or news photographs may be taken from any area to which news personnel have been granted access, as long as they do not interfere with the performance of the duties of Division members.
- B. Anyone placed under arrest will not be posed for a photograph by a Division member. News personnel should not be restricted from taking photographs from an area to which they have lawful access. If photographs are to be taken on Division property, they must be taken from a public access area.
- C. Juvenile offenders should never be purposely exposed to news photographers by a Division member. However, no Division member may interfere with photographers performing their duties on public property.
- D. If a person in custody is in transit, spontaneous interviews with the person in custody will not be prevented as long as unobstructed progress is not interrupted.
- E. In the event of an investigation that appears to be a suicide, the identification of the deceased will be released, pending notification of next of kin, and any statement issued should be limited to "no foul play suspected. The cause and manner of death to be determined by the medical examiner." Further inquiry may be directed to the office of the State Medical Examiner.
- F. In the event of an investigation that appears to be a homicide, no statement concerning the condition of the body will be issued without consultation with the medical examiner or the Office of Attorney General.
- G. In an incident involving a joint investigation, the Public Information Officer or his/her designee, shall coordinate any news release with the other agency. If the Division has primary responsibility in the investigation, the Division will retain the right to release police related information. If the other agency has primary responsibility for the investigation, any request from a member of the news media for police related information will be referred to that other agency.
- H. The District Commanders, Detective Commander, Patrol Commanders, Night Executive Officers and Acting Patrol Commanders, under the direction of the Public Information Officer, shall be responsible for the release of all newsworthy information for any matter under his/her purview. No other member of the Division shall respond to media inquiries unless authorized.

- I. If a designee member has a doubt as to the propriety of releasing any information, he/she shall contact the Public Information Officer, who shall be available on an on-call basis, regarding the proper information to release.
- J. Concerning joint public service agency efforts, the Public Information Officer shall contact the other public service agency's public information officer to discuss the procedures of releasing information pertaining to the joint effort.



By Order of Colonel Assumpico

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Ann C. Assumpico".

Ann C. Assumpico
Colonel
Superintendent